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Message Text

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14
ACTION EB-07

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 ISO-00 CAB-02 CIAE-00 COME-00 DODE-00

DOTE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 CIEP-01 FAA-00 L-03 SS-15

NSC-05 OC-06 CCO-00 PER-01 /056 W
---------- 052966
R 071644Z JUL 76
FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5961

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E.O. 11652: N/A (DECONTROL 31 JULY 1979)
TAGS: EAIR, AFSP, MR
SUBJ: SAFETY OF AIR MAURITANIE--CONTINUED USE BY AMCITS

REF: (A) STATE 165570, (B) NOUAKCHOTT 1360, (C) NOUAKCHOTT 1047

1. INTENT IN DESPATCHING REF C WAS TO REQUEST SPELL-OUT OF CRITERIA USED BY WASHINGTON AGENCIES IN ARRIVING AT JUDGEMENT THAT ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES WAS UNSAFE AND TO BE AVOIDED BY AMCITS. WE POSED QUESTION IN ORDER TO ASCERTAIN WHAT ASPECTS OF AIR MAURITANIE'S (AIRM) DETERIORATING OPERATION WERE PERTINENT TO A PARALLEL JUDGMENT BY WASHINGTON AGENCIES ON CONTINUED USE OF MAURITANIAN NATIONAL AIRLINE, AND TO DESIGN AN INFORMAATION COLLECTION AND REPORTING PROGRAM TO OBTAIN AND FORWARD THE DATA REQUIRED. WE WERE NOT RPT NOT REQUESTING WASHINGTON AGENCIES TO MAKE AN IMMEDIATE JUDGMENT ON AIRM; AND CERTAINLY NOT ON THE BASIS OF NO INFORMATION.

2. PERHAPS WE ARE NOT VERY QUICK ON THE UPTAKE, BUT WE DO NOT YET SEE HOW WE ARE ANY CLOSER TO THE OBJECTIVE IN JULY TAN WE WERE IN JUNE WHEN WE FIRSTPOSED THE QUESTEN RE CRITERIA. RESPONSE TO OUR QUERY (REF A) REPORTS THAT EMBASSY ADDIS "NOTED A SIX-MONTH DECLINE IN EAL SAFETY", BUT OMITS ANY INDICATION OF BENCHMARKS USED BY ADDIS IN ARRIVING AT
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THIS CONCLUSION. OTHER EXAMPLE SUGGESTS AIR AOBCIDENTS

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" EVEN IN QUICK SUCCESSION" ARE NOT RPT NOT RELEVANT CRITERIA. IN ANY EVENT, WE WOULD HOPE TO IDENTIFY SOME BASIS FOR JUDGMENT FOR NON-USE DECISION SHORT OF AIR DISASTER.

3. SO LET'S TRY ANOTHER TACK. HERE IS WHAT EMBOFFS HAVE LEARNED IN UNSTRUCTURED COLLECTION EFFORT:

ITEM: AIRM PILOTS HAVE BEEN FLYING 150 HOURS PER MONTH, WELL IN EXCESS OF FAA 100-HOUR MAXIMUM LIMIT AND NEARLY TWICE STANDARD US AIRLINE PRACTICE OF 80-85 HOURS PER MONTH. IN ONE KNOWN INSTANCE,HXHAUSTED PILOT OVERFLEW NOUAKCHOTT IN FLIGHT FROM DAKAR AND TOOK 12-15 MINUTES TO RECOVER HIS BEARINGS, DO AN ABOUT FACE AND RETURN TO NOUAKCHOTT AIRPORT. PILOTS ARE FLYING FEWER HOURS NOW BUT ONLY BECAUSE CRITICAL MAINTENANCE PROBLEMS HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCED AIRCRAFT AVAILABILITIES.

ITEM: IN APPROXIMATELY 24 MONTHS SINCE HUGHES DELIVERED F-27S AND TRAINED AIRM FLIGHT CREWS TO OPERATE NEW AIR-CRAFT, NONE OF AIRM PILOTS HAVE EVER FLOWN CHECK FLIGHTS WHICH ARE REQUIRED AT LEAST EVERY SIX MONTHS TO INSURE GOOD PILOT HABITS AND CONTINUING FAMILIARITY WITH EMER-GENCY PROCEDURES.

ITEM: IN RECONVERSION OF AIRCRAFT FROM CARGO TO PASSENGER USE, AIRM SIGHT OPERATIONS PERSONNEL FREQUENTLY FAIL TO BOLT SEATS FIRMLY TO DECK.

ITEM: IN RECONVERSION OF AIRCRAFT FROM CARGO TO PASSENGER USE, SEATS FREQUENTLY ARE POSITIONED IN FRONT OF EMERGENCY EXITS. HUGHES TEAM HAS ATTEMPTED TO PREVENT (OR AT LEAST REDUCE OCCURENCE) OF EXIT BLOCKING BY MARKING PROPER LOC-ATIONS ON SEAT TRACKS WITH YELLOW WARNING PAINT. RECORD HAS SINCE BEEN SOMEWHAT BETTER.

ITEM:SEATS FREQUENTLY HAVE NO SEAT BELTS OR HAVE INOPE-RABLE BELTS.

ITEM: LARGE QUANTITIES OF CARGO (SOME OF WHICH IS HEAVY
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AND BULKY ARE FREQUENTLY LOADED ABOARD AFT SECTION OF AIRCRAFT (USUALLY AFTER PASSENGERS ARE BOARDED) AND ARE NOT RPT NOT SECURELY TIED DOWN--SOMETIMES NOT AT ALL SOMETIMES ONLY PERFUNCTORILY.

ITEM: HUGHES MECHANICS HAVE BEEN REQUIRED TO WORK ENOR-MOUS AMOUNTS OF OVERTIME (ONE MAN PUT IN 90 HOURS OF OVER TIME IN ONE TEN-DAY PERIOD OVER AND ABOVE HIS 70-80 HOURS

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OF REGULAR DUTY). INEVITABLY FATIGUE EXACTS PRICE IN RE-
DUCTION OF METICULOUS ATTENTION TO DETAIL. UNTIL RECENTLY
FATIGUE TOLL WAS AGGRAVATED BY SEEMING PERMANENCE OF OVER-
TIME REQUIREMENT. HUGHES TEAM CHIEF, RECOGNIZING DANGER,
ARBITRARILY CUT BANK ON OVERTIME, INFORMING AIRM OPERATIONS
SECTION IT WILL SIMPLY HAVE FEWER AVAILABLE AIRCRAFT.

4. HUGHES AIRWEST FORMAL NOTICE TO MINISTER OF TRANS-
PORTATION ENUMERATED MOST OF ABOVE ITEMS, ALTHOUGH IN
LESS DETAIL. NOTICE ALSO POINTED OUT AIRCRAFT CLEANING
CREWS FREQUENTLY USE AVIATION GAS RATHER THAN CLEANING
AGENTS TO CLEAN EXTERIORS AND INTERIORS OF AIRCRAFT, AND
THAT FIREFIGHTINGEQUIPMENT ON FLIGHT LINE, IN HANGAR,
AND ON AIRCRAFT IS INADEQUATE.
5. FINALLY: AT INSTANCE OF NEW FRENCH NATIONAL DIRECTOR
OF MAINTENANCE, AIRM HAS DECIDED TO TRANSFER MAINTENANCE
OF TWO DC-3S AND DC-4 FROM HUGHES TO UTA AND TO RETURN
THESE AIRCRAFT TO VERITAS BLOCK MAINTENANCE SYSTEM FROM
FAA PERIODIC MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE TO WHICH HUGHES HAS
PAINSTAKINGLY CONVERTED THEM OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS.
(CONVERSTION IS SCHEDULED TO BEGIN THIRD WEEK OF JULY AND
CONTINUE UNTIL OCTOBER.) SINCE MAINTENANCE IN FUTURE WILL
BE DONE IN DAKAR, BRAZZAVILLE AND PERPHAS PARIS, HUGHES
TEAM WILL NOT BE ABLE TO MONITOR AND JUDGE QUALITY.

6. WHILE HUGHES TEAM MEMBERS ARE IN POSITION TO MAKE VERY
GOOD EDUCATED GUESSES ABOUT OVERALL OPERATION OF AIRM, IT
MUST BE NOTED HERE THAT THEY ARE NOT DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN
FLIGHT OPERATIONS AND SO HAVE NO FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE OF
BROAD SEGEMENTS OF AIRM OPERATIONS. THEY CAN, FOR EXAMPLE,
ONLY MAKE EDKUCATED DEDUCTIONS ABOUT OBSERVANCE OF PROCE-
DURES AND SAFETY PRACTICES BY AIRM AIRCREWS. BUT EVEN TO
LAYMAN (ALBEIT AN EXPERIENCED FOREIGN SERVICE AIR TRAVE-
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LER), IT IS CLEAR THAT AIRM PILOTS ARE INCLINED TO GIVE
SHORT SHRIFT TO PRE-FLIGHT CHECKLIST PROCEDURES AND TO
IGNORE USUAL (IF NOT MANDATORY) PRE TAKEOFF ENGINE
WARMUP.

7. CONCLUSION: WE THINK THERE IS POTENTIALLY SERIOUS
PROBLEM HERE BUT WITHOUT SOME PRECISE INDICATION OF
CRITERIA ON WHICH A JUDGMENT OF "UNSAFE" AND A DECI-
SION TO AVOID USE ARE BASED, OR SOME DETAILED INSTRUC-
TIONS ON WHAT QUESTIONS WE AS LAYMEN SHOULD VPUT TO
EITHER HUGHES OR AIRM OR BOTH, THERE IS LITTLE WE CAN
DO TO GO BEYOND THIS IMPRESSIONISTIC ASSESSMENT. WE
WOULD THERE FORE VERY MUCH APPRECIATE SOME PROFESSIONAL,
TECHNICAL GUIDANCE FROM WASHINGTON AGENCIES.

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HANDYSIDE

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